

Q: Today is September 14, 2017. My name is Helene Tischler. I'm here at the Newton City Hall Law Library with Priscilla Lasmarias Kelso, and today we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center. Thank you so much for being here.

A: You're welcome.

Q: Let's start from the beginning. What country are you originally from, why did you leave? Tell us a little bit about that.

A: I'm originally from the Philippines, that's where I was born. However, I have lived longer here in the United States--50 years actually--than I have lived in my home country. But I do belong to two roots. I'm a dual citizen of the Philippines and the United States. I carry two passports for both countries and because I came here as an adult--well, a young adult, I was 20, and I didn't come in a leaky boat. I came through an international scholarship at Stanford University to do my graduate work in English and American literature after I finished my Bachelor's degree at a Presbyterian university in the Philippines. And so I came with, I would say, the red carpet out. I am very aware of a lot of Asians, since my husband and I have been part of resettlement for Vietnamese and Indo-Chinese refugees in Newton--this was one of the first cities to open its doors to resettlement in the '80's--and they have lived with us and they came under terrible conditions, terrible duress. I flew Pan American Airlines--used to be, it's no longer in the skies--but I came as an international scholar and so I had a lot of wonderful experiences that were anything but traumatic. I think the trauma, if you can call it that, was leaving my family for the first time.

Q: Did anyone come with you?

A: No, I was alone. I was alone. Yeah. I was 20, I was very young, I was in a very high-powered

university where I was competing for grades with people half my age, but that was probably for me the cutting edge of my first American experience here, was academic work and academic pressure. And I lived to tell the tale.

Q: Yes, certainly. What was it like leaving your country, at the time?

A: Alright. I think you have to understand the Asian, especially the Filipino, extended family system, where there are so many of us within the extended family. And leaving my family--I'm the eldest of eight so I come from a large family--leaving the country as well as leaving my family was probably the hardest.

I think that it can be better explained metaphorically through a recurrent dream I used to have. I don't have it anymore, but for years and years I would have this dream of being in my grandmother's house where we would have feasting and cousins and aunts and uncles, neighbors, relatives. And then I would have to leave for the airport to come to America. And in this dream I would be in this bus with my luggage and I would be having some anxieties about the fact that I had to leave my family. And then I would be at the airport and then my mother would be there and I would have all this unsorted pieces of luggage that really annoyed me because I am very organized and I like to color-code my luggage. And then in the dream my mother--the reason I'm sharing dreams is, aside from just the factual top of the head, left brain, there is a lot of depth that happens in the lives of people who leave their homes, and dreams never lie--and in this particular dream, my mother says, "Priscilla, these are gifts for you, you know, this unsorted pieces of luggage." And I would be in the plane, I would be belted, ready to go and the plane never leaves.

I had that recurrent dream for a long time, but not anymore. I've lived in Newton for 48 years; it's time to replace that dream with something else, right? Actually, when you move from one culture, from one set of beginnings to another and you have to adopt a new home, a new culture, a new country--in my case, marrying an American and living here, choosing to live here and

work here for my professional life--that exacts a certain price. And most of the time it doesn't show because people like us who have assimilated really looked like we're all--you know, we can out-American the Americans! I speak the language so it hasn't been a difficulty at all for me to adjust here because I teach college English, graduate school, right? And as a result for a lot of Asian immigrants here, the lack of language proficiency is such a purgatory road. If you can put yourselves in another culture where you don't speak the language like, you know, Latin America or China or Africa, you can understand a little bit of what emotional and psychic energy it takes to actually survive in another culture if the language is not something you can work with.

Q: So you learned English in the Philippines?

A: Yes, yes, yes, because we were a protectorate, a colony of America after the war of 1898, which America won over the Spaniards, who colonized us for over 300 years. That's why my family name is Lasmarias, which is a Spanish name. People think I'm Hispanic before they meet me. But I did learn English along with three other languages, well, as a child, as an elementary school child, because we would have our mother tongue, which is one of 100 dialects in the Philippines--it's an island nation so we have dialects--which is Cebuano, then in school I'd have to learn Tagalog, which is the national language, which is the language of north, the imperial north, then I had to learn Spanish, because Spanish was a cultural language of the country for a long, long time and then I had to learn English. So I would do homework in three languages and speak another language at home and it never occurred to me that it was difficult. It was just the way we lived; we were just very multilingual. When I say that to monolinguals like Americans they just go, "What? You navigated in four languages?"

And then obviously in college I majored in English. I was in law school for two years and--because my grandmother wanted a lawyer in the family. She had a lot of land and she said "You can only trust a relative to defend you in court when you have some land troubles." But I

fell in love with literature, mostly American literature, and decided to become a literature professor.

Q: That's wonderful. Now, you mentioned you've lived in Newton 48 years.

A: Yes indeed.

Q: So where did you go after Stanford? There was a little transition before you came here.

A: I taught at this university, Silliman University, which is a Presbyterian school founded by Presbyterian missionaries in 1901. And I taught there for five years and then got a job offer from the University of Pennsylvania to work with their international programs. I've had a two-track career, which is teaching university English and also international education. So actually my work at UPenn was the beginning of my international education work.

And then I got married there--my husband was a student in the area--and we moved to Boston in '69 and lived in Newtonville. And we've always lived in Newtonville, except we've moved from a couple of apartments and then we own a home now on Harrington Street near the Post Office. But having said that, it's interesting how, in a sense, Newton shaped my professional life because I ended up working at Northeastern University, where you worked, and did international education there. But Newton has been my home. I started in California for two years of graduate school, moved to Pennsylvania for three years of Office of International Services--I was Assistant Director there--and then moved here and ended up working at Northeastern. And we've lived in the same house for 41 years. We are not tourists, we are settlers, we just don't move!

Q: Was it very different coming to Newton after California, Pennsylvania, or was it an easy transition?

A: Well, I was a young bride. We moved here right after the wedding, immediately. So I started here and so everything was new. I love Newton--I think I said that in my file that I sent you earlier--because of its educational ethos and being so near to the big schools: Harvard, MIT, BU. I worked at BC as a volunteer, when I was nursing a baby, for International Programs, I mean, BC, Boston College. I think I like the fact that we live in an academic bubble here.

I have always enjoyed the fact that because we have not moved from our house, I know the person at my bank, at CVS, at the Post Office. I mean, that's important to me, because I come from a country where people know who you are and your family. I mean, you know, I go to the market in my island home and I would be known not as Priscilla Lasmarias but *apo ni Cecilia*, the granddaughter of Cecilia, so even the way that you would be seen by people in the locality is an indicator of the fact that you have roots. And maybe because I moved here so young, I think subconsciously I've decided not to move at all after I settled here. I wanted the teapot to be in the same place and it's been there for 48 years!

Q: I think a lot of immigrants feel that way. Was it very difficult transitioning at the time, and were the cultural differences really difficult for you at the time?

A: I think what was difficult was the Vietnam War. Because this was '69 and this was the height of resistance in Newton--Newton being Newton, right?--and I marched to the Boston Common seven months pregnant to oppose the war. And that was probably--since you're asking about what was difficult--I am a child of war. I was born four months before Pearl Harbor and as a result, war to me is an obscenity, any form of war. And so the Vietnam War, when we were here, we were just settling in an apartment very close to Walnut Street and very close to the high school, which was a hotbed for resistance, as well as the universities here. So the very fact that I marched at the Boston Common seven months pregnant after seeing Indo-Chinese mothers, Vietnamese mothers and children being blown up by carpet bombing and you know, the craziness of what that war was supposed to be. We're starting a series on it on PBS on Sunday,

with Ken Burns, you know that. I don't know what that's supposed to do for us, but at least--that would probably be--it's interesting that my hardest transitions here have been the Vietnam War and 9/11, which was only three days ago. I think these kinds of cataclysmic events, whether they happen overseas or whether they happen four hours from here, in New York, have a way of making me feel not so much unhinged but just sad and unnerved. I think that's true for a lot of people. But I think for immigrants who who have learned to love this country and who have pledged allegiance to the flag and you know, hope for a good future for America, it is hard to see to see what happens politically and geo-politically and militarily. Yeah.

Q: I can imagine. And were there certain cultural differences you felt very strongly between the Philippines and the United States then and I don't know if it's continued?

A: Yeah. Well, okay. Two things. We moved to our house in 1975, 76, because we needed our daughter to have a more permanent place to live in kindergarten. We were gypsies before that. We moved to California and lived in community with friends near Napa Valley, and then we were head residents for Lasell College, the dormitory, and then finally Rachel was five and I said to my husband, "You know it's time to move permanently." And so we did. And so it's a small neighborhood and I thought, "Somebody should come around and greet me--I'm new here, I may look Asian, I didn't look like I came from the Mayflower--but you know this is my home now." No one did, okay, so I invited people to my house! It probably blew them away, like "My goodness! This lady is from another planet."

Q: You took the lead.

A: I took the lead and I think over the years in our neighborhood I have taken the lead, I organize a little annual picnic for people who have not moved. You know, you just have to do it because it's organic to me to be hospitable.

Q: You wanted that community.

A: The other one which really I wouldn't say has been a big adjustment is because I'm in an interracial marriage--my husband is Scottish-American with a Filipino heart; he's been to the Philippines 15 times and he's loved there--when we would show up in places where people didn't know us, I would have this feeling that the stereotypes would kick in: that he was a military man because the Philippines have American air bases, a GI, a military man who snatched me from some island and brought me here, and I couldn't speak English and I'm his little Asian bride. And so, you know we've traveled across the country, and you know there are parts of this country where you look like Mork and Mindy, so to speak, like extraterrestrials when you're walking around in a place where nobody has ever seen an interracial couple. And the stereotypes do kick in because our daughter was asked when she was in elementary school, "Was your mother a Hong Kong barmaid?" I'm kidding, but the equivalent of that, and she says, "No, she's a graduate of Stanford. And she's a university professor and my father is a Protestant minister in Cambridge near Harvard." So, you know, she would set people right in terms of--there were some--just because she obviously doesn't look Nordic, she's brown and, you know, Asian like me. Her Scottish DNA is very low-key.

So I would say between the lack of neighborliness, that has changed. Actually, because our street, which is a small street that used to be occupied by people who either ended up in nursing homes or have died, and these have been made into apartments or condos. We have this U-Haul culture where people move in and out. And I say to my husband, "Are they moving in or out? Shall we say hello or goodbye?" And so there were a few houses--I'd say maybe five on a good day--where people have stayed there as long as we have. But by and large we have this very mobile, revolving door set of people and it's hard to connect, you know? And as you get older in in this culture and in this world you have to make connections. Otherwise it can be scary.

Q: Absolutely. So you mentioned some of the cultural differences in terms about community and everyone knowing you by your name. Was there anything similar you noticed when you came to Newton, in terms of culture, values, some of the people, anything similar to the Philippines?

A: Similar from California?

Q: No, from the Philippines.

A: Oh, from the Philippines. Similar...I'll have to think hard about that. Because I think unless you go to another country, like my home country, you'll find out how dissimilar these places are. Well, it's a very well-educated city I come from because of the universities there.

Q: Which city?

A: This would be the city of Dumaguete, which is on Negros Island 300 miles south of Manila. And it's a university town. So I lived there. And this is like a university town because Harvard is 15 minutes from the commuter rail, and BC is here, and Babson, and Brandeis, and Bentley. I mean, we are contiguously surrounded by many colleges--Lasell, and so forth.

Q: So it was comfortable.

A: Yeah. Off the top of my head, I cannot really find a lot of similarities except the academic setup, which has been very comfortable for me.

Q: Did you feel that your idea of America and Newton was the same as what you thought it would be? Your expectations when you left the Philippines to come here, was it very different when you came? Was it what you expected?

A: Well, yes and no.

Q: I know it's hard to go back....but in terms of expectations. I know the academics, you mentioned, which were very strong.

A: First of all, I never watched television until I came to this country at the age of 20, and that alone I think speaks volumes about my expectations. I did not see images of America via TV. Like right now, we are so globalized that anybody coming to this country would already have a lot of preconceived images through internet and other sources. But no, I didn't watch television until I came here. I did watch movies of America--with America. And Doris Day, who my mother liked, was somebody I watched. And then seeing snow and a lot of cars. I come from an island--it's changed now, but we were not as mobile as we are here.

And so when I came I think one preparation I had which worked in my favor was I had American professors at this university. In fact, my moving from law school to literature was premised on the fact that I had one American professor from the University of Pennsylvania, among other places, who really taught me to love literature, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne, whom I wrote my thesis on and so forth.

But I think an immigrant coming to this country with no contact with Americans, would really--never mind no language proficiency--would have really I think a monumental adjustment. And also, my marrying an American was almost like a segue to the fact that I felt very comfortable with American folks. Whereas, you know, you can talk to immigrants now or maybe in earlier years since this is an immigrant project, for whom relating to Americans would have been just very difficult, culturally as well as in terms of the language. And it's interesting that, you know, I've just heard that there are people in Chinatown who have been here for more than 50 years who don't speak English and they just are among themselves. And I can understand some of that, the comfort level of being with people who are like you, who live like you, who eat

food--and speak the language. So I would say on a scale of one to five, I probably had a number of advantages in my favor coming here.

Q: And fairly realistic expectations about what it would be like.

A: And the fact that my parents gave me their blessing to come. That's important because sometimes there are immigrants who come against the wishes of their families and that is a hard road to hoe because family is such an important part of your life when you're from Asia, whether you like it or not. That's just what it is.

Q: And so you felt pretty welcome when you came?

A: Yes--

Q: In each community or were there differences?

A: I did, and I think as I said a moment ago, it's because of my language proficiency and the fact that I'm off the charts as an extrovert. As Maya Angelou would say, when you go into a room say to yourself, "You have every right to be here as well as anyone else." That's important when you're a person of color, you're a woman, and you're trying to--what's the word?--validate your existence. And maybe because of the fact that I already validated my existence as a professional in the Philippines and in the places where I worked prior to Newton, you know, I could--I've been in boardrooms; I've been on the Board of Trustees of two schools. And also, I feel very comfortable speaking my mind and you know, that can be a plus and a minus. Because some people expect Asian women to be, you know, very polite and very quiet and not rock the boat. And I am not polite, I am not quiet, and I rock the boat.

Q: That's great. And is that a family tradition?

A: It's my grandmother's tradition! Not my mother. The Lasmarias side of my life is very out there, it's very proactive. We're a political family. My mother's family, which is the Laxina side, is very sedate and very calm and very, you know, "peace at any price." So I have both possibilities. My husband knows that.

Q: That's wonderful. So one tradition was you had some outspoken women in your family. Are there other traditions that you felt you held on to here, or that you've started new traditions with your family?

A: You mean with my American family? With my one daughter, who's now 46.

Q: --here, right, and then some you've held onto from home. Are there traditions you've--

A: Well, you know, family gatherings, food...My daughter is very global; in fact, she's leaving for Ireland tonight. She's the Chief Communications Officer of the American Ireland Fund, which is one of the largest philanthropies actually in the United States. So we are a very international family. You know, we have Scottish beginnings, my husband loves to eat Scottish food, which I don't know how to cook because...haggis, yeah, oatmeal. My daughter is a gourmet cook and loves Paris, so she cooks French food. But she also knows how to cook Filipino food. I've taught her how to cook Filipino adobo, which is a fusion of Chinese and Spanish cooking and it just makes your house smell like a million bucks. Because it has everything, you know, garlic, ginger, brown sugar, pork, chicken and then you have steamed rice. It's the comfort food. And she said that when she moved into her house with her husband, the first thing she cooked was Filipino adobo and she started to cry. So you know there's a lot of deep resonance there.

Q: [00:29:15]

A: Well, we can make ham and cheese stew and start to cry, but there's something about--

Q: There's something about cooking that that's the link. How is her experience you think different being raised here than you were raised in your own country? I'm sure we can have a whole interview about that--

A: Oh, so different. But it is different, because she's an only child and I'm the eldest of eight. And that alone, the numbers, the arithmetic of that makes you know how I've just been so embedded in the lives of my siblings and she's by herself and she's okay, she's happy with it. But raising an Asian-American child from grade school up, especially when she became a teenager and a college student, was probably more difficult for me than for my husband. And so we had this little family--I would call it triangulating, when you have one child you triangulate--where whenever she needed to discuss issues about dating and other things having to do with growing up, she would invariably talk with my husband. They would have a breakfast date to talk about it when she was at Newton North and Day Junior High.

And I would be like the cultural mama, because children are raised so differently here from Asia. I mean, you know that. And I always said--this was the joke in the family: when she asked me when she was in junior high, "Mom, what about dating?" and I said, "Well, you know I was not allowed to go out with a fellow until I finished college and I was chaperoned." And she said, "What's a chaperone?" And I explained to her it's somebody who goes with you to make sure you behave and she said, "Well, were you born in the Dark Ages?" I said "No, I was born in Asia where women were protected." But you know, that was my generation. That has changed now. There's so much modernism that goes on now among the young in the Philippines, for good or ill. They all have their smartphones and lots of pocket money, and lots of makeup, and short shorts.

Q: Not what you would have done at home. In terms of thinking about your experiences, what do you feel has been sort of the biggest challenge or challenges, you know, what's been the greatest successes? I mean, you've got a lot from what you're saying in terms of your academic life, and professional life, and family and community. But what do you feel have been the biggest challenges for you?

A: Or the biggest successes?

Q: Yeah, I mean, whatever you feel like you want to address.

A: Well, this is interesting, because when you reach "7-0" you have to ask that question. And there's a difference between being happy and having meaning. I mean, the pursuit of happiness is very intense here. We know that, for good or ill. I mean--and happiness is ephemeral; it comes and goes, whereas meaning is organic; it's in your DNA, it stays with you for a long, long time. And I think for me, enabling my nieces and nephews in the Philippines to get a college education at this Presbyterian university is my legacy. And I call it "God's economy" and I don't want to be over-spiritual. I just feel like because I have one child, it's been easier for me to help out with the children of my siblings. And maybe because education has always been valued in my family, by my grandmother, who was not allowed to go to school--she was just allowed to learn to read so she could read her Spanish prayers. And my mother was valedictorian of her high school, but she was not allowed to go to college because she was a girl, and why waste college education on a girl? And then I came along and the Americans came along and had this university which was open for women for the first time and I became a recipient of that wonderful legacy of higher education. So without having been coerced or anything I've just offered my resources to the children of my siblings, especially those who couldn't afford to send the kids to college, that I would be the one to do it and give them a future. And I would consider that probably one of the things that started with my grandmother and my mother and me and believing in the future of our family.

Q: And they all stayed there?

A: Most of them are there. We have one in Missouri and another in North Carolina. They're starting to kind of slowly glide in. But I say to them, "Look, if you're happy in the Philippines, you have good jobs, you can afford household help, you can go to the beach on weekends--stay there. Don't come to America. Come to America to visit us so we can show you Boston, we can show you Harvard, we can show you Boston Harbor, take you to Rockport. But don't come here, because--especially if you're an adult--your transition to this country is really so much more intense and sadly so much more labor intensive in the heart and in the mind. Because I have a brother who came to help out with the kids in North Carolina and he said, "I cannot live there, the place is so isolating."

I had an aunt who came with us several trips ago, her first trip here. She was going to get her PhD somewhere in Illinois, but we thought we'd bring her to Newton first and give her a little cultural introduction to America. And it was the summer--it was September? I think it was summer--and we passed by Commonwealth Avenue, the trophy homes and Waban, you know, the show-and-tell of Newton, Chestnut Hill. And she said, "Where are the people?" She said, "These houses look haunted." And I said, "Well, people here don't come out. They're in their summer homes at the Hamptons, maybe, Cape Cod or whatever." But there is no street life. And she was so appalled at how such lovely homes could have no people in them--I mean, at least sitting out in the yard! And that was her first--I had lived here so long, I took it for granted, this is how we live here. And then when she sees how few people live in so much space in our houses, she says, you know, "12 people can live here." It's just a very different way of, I think, assessing closeness or intimacy.

Actually, it's interesting because my adjustment when I go back to the Philippines is: there are just too many people here! I mean, give me my privacy. You know, I want to be alone. And then when they come here they look out the window and they say, "This place feels haunted."

Q: The population differences are great, right. Even on your island, the population was large or--

A: It's a very densely populated island. Bart seems--he's really a Filipino more than I give him credit. He's there and he loves the fact that there are so many relatives. He has no aunts or uncles or cousins here. He has one relative who lives in Maryland, a sister--that's it, an unmarried sister. But he goes there and he sees all the generations of relatives. We have family reunions for more than 100 people show up. We have Christmas or Easter dinners here and we're lucky to have six...mostly four. [Laughter] That's a crowd. Anyway.

Q: So you advise them to stay in the Philippines. Is there any other advice you would give someone moving here from the Philippines now? I know it's different than when you came. What advice would you have for them?

A: Don't isolate yourself. Look around and see who are the established people from your home country, who can give you some survival tips, coping tips. For instance, there's a family we've become close to--she is a lawyer, she worked at Harvard, Kennedy School now, directing one of the programs. She's a hotshot, intellectual. Her husband is here, her three boys are here--twins and a grade school child--and they live close to Cambridge. And she called me after like one week here and she said, "I'm doing laundry for the first time in my life." And I said, "Welcome to America, you'll be doing more." Back where she was, she had staff--she had two [00:39:51], which are caregivers for the children, she had a cook, a gardener, a housekeeper, and somebody who would massage her after she came home. And now she's doing all of the above plus full-time work at Kennedy School. But she comes to our house--they come to our house--they're coming next week, and we talk and we laugh about it. And she said, "You know, I think I can

last here for maximum 10 years,” which is good, because at first she thought she could not last here for 10 weeks. She’s been here three years now.

So I’d say hang in with people who have been here long enough who can say to you, “You won’t die. You can do laundry and it won’t kill you.” But I’m sure she was feeling like, “Oh, my God, I have all these wonderful law degrees, and I’m doing laundry. What happened to me?” But I said to her, “Look, if you’re in America you do what has to be done.” You can be a hyphenated American--like we have tons of them now, Italian-American, Hispanic-American, Filipino-American, I mean, you name it--but at some point you just have say to yourself, “Look, if I have changed my citizenship,” which I did 35 years ago, “I have to figure out what it means to be American in the United States and what it means to be American in my neighborhood and what it means to be American in Newton, which is my home and I have no plans to leave at all.”

But know who the people are who have been here long enough who can let you in to some wonderful possibilities about living here so you won’t be whining all the time. But the countervailing part of that is: don’t just hang out with people from your island or people who speak your language or eat the food you do because you’ll be so securely comfort zoning it that you would never really know what it’s like to live in another country. What’s the point in coming here if all you do is speak your language, and eat--or just be so culturally...what’s the word?...claustrophobic.

Q: How large is the Filipino community in Newton?

A: In Newton? That’s a good question. Well, in America there’s about three million of us. We’re one of the largest immigrant groups in this country. Somebody said we’re the second largest. The first is Korean-Americans and we’re the second. So we’re a voting bloc, I mean, politicians court us. And by the way, I was so glad to see Amy Mah Sangiolo run--even if she didn’t make it--for mayor in Newton, because she looks like me. It’s good.

I think the community in Newton is not as large. I'll tell you why: Boston in general has one of the smaller contingents of Filipino-Americans or Filipinos because A) it's cold--people start here and then they move to Texas or Florida or California; and secondly, the large number of Filipinos here are mostly in the academic fields, the professions. Whereas nurses--we have thousands of nurses here in this country--tend to gravitate to places like when I was in Houston five years ago, that's where the big universities--I mean, hospitals are. But by and large, the Filipinos I've met here are often in universities and colleges and it'd be mostly I think a professional group, not service-oriented or whatever else. It's a small group, smaller than New York. You go to New York, you go to San Francisco, you go to LA and the place is swarming with Filipinos. And also, immigration tends to bunch up depending on where you already have a large contingent. For instance, because San Jose, California has a large group of Vietnamese from the very beginning, that's where new immigrants who come to this country or even people who are already in this country tend to gravitate. They'll move there because it's where your fourth cousins are, it's warmer, and they sell gorgeous Vietnamese food in San Jose, I know that.

Q: I used to teach in San Jose.

A: Did you?

Q: I did.

A: Did you work at the State College? Because I worked with the Peace Corps there.

Q: San Jose City College. Vietnamese and Cambodian students at the time. But very interesting. Okay, so you've given us a great perspective of--

A: I've talked too much.

Q: No, not at all, in fact we want you to keep talking! Reflecting back, though, on your childhood, are there memories that stick with you--besides the dream, I know, your grandmother, the wonderful food--that you feel still linger and sort of keep affecting your life? What are the sweetest memories?

A: The sweetest memories are picking ripe fruit from my mother's and grandmother's orchard. Picking fruit--in fact today, I just picked tomatoes from my daughter's garden and it just--it nourishes my soul. I'm happy, you know? And I don't even want to intellectualize that or parse that and say why. Maybe because as children these were our snacks. We didn't have Twinkies or potato chips. We don't eat potatoes in the Philippines, we have rice. We didn't have chocolate brownies or whatever, but we had fruit in our grandmother's garden--orchard, we call it an orchard because my family's a homestead. And going out to pick ripe fruit from the tree and eating it straight from the tree--even gathering peanuts, pulling up the plant and seeing the nodules and removing the earth and eating these peanuts that taste like the earth--that is so holy to me it's almost like being connected to creation. Well, you know, we can go to Star Market and have blueberries from Maine and gorgeous-looking peaches from wherever, but they have been stored for six months somewhere else, and that doesn't really do much for me. I mean, yeah, ripe, but picking fruit, ripe fruit to eat, to me is the sweetest.

And let me tell you--I began with a dream, I'll end with a dream. When I was under academic stress at Stanford, because you know it was a very rigorous program, I would have this comfort dream before an exam of picking fruit called manzanitas, which means little apples. And they are from low-lying branches so that if you're like five, eight years old you can actually pick them yourself. And after a rain, a tropical rain, miraculously it seems like all the fruit become ripe and red. They're like little red small things that you can pop in your mouth like little red blueberries. And I would have this dream of picking them after a rain and popping them in my mouth and I would feel okay, and I would, like, ace the test the following day. But the pre-test anxiety that

makes you feel like you're feeling rattled and feeling scared--you know when I got my first B at Stanford I thought I'd die, it was so shameful. I mean, Asia is a very shame-based culture, sadly. And then somebody said to me, "Priscilla, in graduate school if you get a B, you should drink champagne or something!" And I thought, "Oh really? Oh gosh..." But having said that, I think we all have primal memories of what grounds us. I haven't been having these dreams, the manzanitas, because maybe I haven't been under a lot of stress since retirement. Retirement is a little bit less stress than nine to five plus two commutes and the commuter rail and the underground--what do you call this--T to get to Northeastern. How did you commute?

A: I drove.

Q: Oh you did. I had two trains every day.

A: I had to pick my kids up after school.

Q: So that would be my memory, and that wasn't solo. I would have like six cousins with me, maybe ten of us. We didn't have money in our pockets to actually buy stuff, so we just kind of maximized what was ripening in our grandmother's backyard. And if we needed peanuts, we would pull out the plant and then if we didn't have any mature peanuts we would put it back in the ground again and then when the sun would rise, would shine on the plant, the plant would all kind of fall to the ground and my grandmother would always know who were the culprits. But the taste of fresh peanuts straight from the ground when you pull up the plant--you have to do it! It's almost like tasting peaches straight from the orchard; it's never like what you buy at the store. So anyway, this whole idea of me surrounded by greenery and ripening fruit--a lot of it and they were mostly red, you know, clusters--and having your cousins...So my mother made all of our dresses so all of our clothes had pockets because when you pick fruit, you better have some pockets! And that's my memory of living in a small, small-ish island in the tropics where it never snowed and where the cousins grew up together, and the ripe fruit was like...the best.

Q: That's wonderful. Thanks for sharing that. Is there anything that we haven't covered that you wanted to talk about?

A: Well I'm writing a book, or trying to. It's slow, but it'll get done. It's called *Growing Two Gardens* and it's really the metaphor of my mother's garden and my garden in Newtonville. I'm using that really as the matrix for a bicultural experience of different soil, different textures, different weather, different harvests. And I'm just playing with the metaphor that, you know, we belong to different gardens and it's called *Growing Two Gardens*. And it's honoring my beginnings in the Philippines and also honoring my beginnings here. Because my husband and I and our daughter are gardeners. There's something really deeply symbolic about gardens. It's a very nonviolent act. I believe in whatever you do, do something nonviolent because it's the tipping point for this very edgy world of ours. And so forth. So, someday if it comes out, I will let you know.

Q: Thank you so much for taking the time to do this with us. And we're really happy that you're included in Newton Talks Oral History project.

A: Thank you. I am the first Filipino woman in this group too, of the 39 that you've already interviewed.

__: We have eight other immigrants.

A: Right. There's been Asian men and a lot of other immigrants. But I thought, "You know? They need a Filipino woman there."

Q: Absolutely. Thank you so much. This is wonderful.

A: By all means. You know what? This is better altogether because I call it a long shelf-life. This will stick around, stay for a long time in the archives. When in the year 2085 people will look at the archives and say, “Oh my goodness, these people, I feel they lived here and they had something to say.”

Q: Yes, and wonderful things. Really, thank you for sharing that.

END OF INTERVIEW